United Nations A/70/677/Add.1–E/2016/48/Add.1

General Assembly
Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
28 January 2016

Original: English

General Assembly
Seventieth session
Agenda item 140
Joint Inspection Unit

Economic and Social Council
2016 session
Agenda item 15
Regional cooperation

Cooperation among the United Nations regional commissions

Note by the Secretary-General

Addendum

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the General Assembly and of the Economic and Social Council his comments and those of the executive secretaries of the regional commissions on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Cooperation among the United Nations regional commissions" (A/70/677-E/2016/48).

16-01088 (E) 040216

Please recycle

Summary

The report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Cooperation among the United Nations regional commissions" aims to assess the relevance and effectiveness of cooperation among the regional commissions, cooperation between the regional commissions and other United Nations system entities and the interface between the regional and global governance and decision-making bodies of the regional commissions.

The present note reflects the views of the Secretary-General and of the executive secretaries of the regional commissions on the recommendations provided in the report.

I. General comments

1. The Secretary-General and the executive secretaries of the regional commissions welcome the report entitled "Cooperation among the regional commissions". They express appreciation for the analysis and recommendations by the Joint Inspection Unit on how to increase the contributions of the regional commissions to the effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including through enhanced coordination and cooperation among the commissions as well as with other United Nations entities at the country, regional and global levels.

2. The Secretary-General and the executive secretaries note that cooperation among the regional commissions has been ongoing for years as a means to provide effective and impactful deliverables to their member countries, whether in terms of knowledge products, policy analysis and advice or capacity development. Meeting the demands of the regions is the main incentive for the cooperation, which has therefore always been driven by substance.

3. With this in mind, the regional commissions have intensified their cooperation since 2008, including in response to the global financial and economic crisis. The resources provided through the Development Account of the United Nations proved particularly valuable in supporting concrete interregional projects among the commissions and in cross-fertilizing effective policies and expertise among the regions.

4. Cooperation among the regional commissions also gained momentum in 2014, with the appointment by the Secretary-General in November 2013, in consultation with the executive secretaries, of a Special Adviser on Interregional Policy Cooperation (November 2013). At their meeting in Santiago in March 2014, hosted by the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean as Coordinator, the regional commissions agreed on four criteria to guide the selection of areas for interregional policy cooperation, namely: (a) responding to demand driven by the regions; (b) catalysing a transformative agenda in the regions; (c) contributing to balanced sustainable development and the 2030 Agenda priorities in the regions; and (d) leveraging value added through the best collective expertise of the commissions. The executive secretaries also agreed to pursue interregional policy cooperation initiatives on three levels, namely: (a) cooperation addressing the regional-global nexus; (b) cooperation involving two or three regional commissions; and (c) cooperation involving United Nations and non-United Nations partners, including through the Regional Coordination Mechanism.

5. At the meeting, the executive secretaries also agreed to further promote cooperation among the regional commissions through a Development Account project on promoting equality. The momentum was carried forward into the meeting of the executive secretaries in Beirut in September 2015, hosted by the Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia as Coordinator. Additional specific areas of cooperation were endorsed at that meeting, including in support of sustainable energy.

6. It should be noted that the modalities of cooperation among the regional commissions are well established, including through regular meetings of the executive secretaries; the role of the executive secretary in assuming the function of Coordinator on an annual basis; and the role of the Regional Commissions

New York Office in supporting and promoting such cooperation. The executive secretaries therefore welcome and accept the recommendations by the Joint Inspection Unit to codify such practices, namely, through recommendations 1, 2 and 4. They also welcome the intent and thrust of the other recommendations included in the report, as detailed in the specific comments below.

II. Specific comments on recommendations

Recommendation 1

The executive secretaries of the regional commissions should develop and approve, by 2016, a formal modus operandi for the effective conduct of their regular meetings, including preparation of meeting agenda, formulation of objectives, follow-up and monitoring of implementation of the decisions, by assigning corresponding responsibilities to the Chiefs of Programme Planning and the Regional Commissions New York Office.

7. The executive secretaries accept the recommendation. The recommended modus operandi for the conduct of their regular meetings is being developed and will be adopted by 2016.

Recommendation 2

The executive secretaries of the regional commissions should develop and adopt, by 2016, specific terms of reference for the Coordinator of the Regional Commissions that detail his/her roles and responsibilities, including term limit and the modalities for coordination, consultation, decision-making, representation and handover from the incumbent Coordinator to the next.

8. The executive secretaries accept the recommendation. Specific terms of reference for the Coordinator are being developed and will be adopted by 2016.

Recommendation 3

The executive secretaries of the regional commissions should explore the possibility of establishing a common online platform for knowledge-management, more systematic exchanges of lessons learned and good practices as well as an advocacy tool, in order to increase the profile and visibility of their activities and promote their products at the global level.

9. The executive secretaries welcome the intent of the recommendation. Since the recommendation to establish a knowledge-based online platform for multiple purposes may require different types of platforms, the executive secretaries tasked their chiefs of programme planning and the Regional Commissions New York Office with reverting to them with a specific proposal.

Recommendation 4

The executive secretaries of the regional commissions should adopt, by 2016, specific terms of reference that clearly define the functions, responsibilities, resources and accountability of the Regional Commissions New York Office and adapt the job descriptions of the Director and the staff of the Office, as needed.

10. The executive secretaries accept the recommendation. Specific terms of reference for the Regional Commissions New York Office are being developed and will be adopted by 2016.

Recommendation 5

The Economic and Social Council should review the existing legislation relating to the objectives and modalities of the Regional Coordination Mechanism, building on inputs from the regional commissions consolidated in a report of the Secretary-General, and taking into account the relevant provisions of General Assembly resolution 67/226 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, with a view to strengthening the coordination role of the Mechanism and clarifying its interface with the United Nations Development Group regional teams.

11. The Secretary-General welcomes the recommendation. He will address the recommendation for consideration by the Economic and Social Council in his annual report to the Council on regional cooperation in the economic, social and related fields.

Recommendation 6

The Secretary-General should consider requesting the Deputy Secretary-General to serve as a facilitator between the regional commissions and other United Nations system entities and assist, as and when needed, in the resolution of outstanding issues between them.

12. The Secretary-General welcomes the intent of the recommendation. He notes that the Deputy Secretary-General will continue to promote collaboration between entities to ensure intersectoral and inter-institutional coherence of activities and programmes in accordance with his delegated responsibilities.

Recommendation 7

The General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council should invite the regional commissions to submit, on an annual basis, substantive and analytical reports on their activities for discussion under the pertinent agenda items, with a view to enabling the Assembly and the Council to fully benefit from the work of the commissions and provide them with guidance and oversight at the global level.

13. The Secretary-General welcomes the intent of the recommendation and will abide by the decision of Member States on this matter. However, he notes the potential programme budget implications related to the production, editing and translation of such reports in the six official languages if they were to be mandated by the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council. In this regard, he suggests that, instead, consideration be given to enhancing the current practice used by the regional commissions to meet the intent of the recommendation by sharing pertinent information with the support of the Regional Commissions New York Office through the secretariats of the respective United Nations intergovernmental bodies and by establishing hyperlinks to the relevant agenda items allocated to the Second and Third Committees of the Assembly and to the relevant agenda items of the Economic and Social Council.